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The Specificity of the Scripture's Canon

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ABSTRACT. This study is aimed at capturing some aspects relating to the specificities of the Biblical Canon. The two parts of the Holy Scripture are analyzed in the attempt to find an answer to the question: why is there a limited number of sacred and canonical books? The point of view used for the analysis of the themes is the historical perspective, with a focus on the evolution of the writings of the Old and of the New Testament, until their capturing in an official catalog. The study ends with a summary of the elements that can help a better understanding of the Canon of the Scripture.

1. INTRODUCTION

The word "canon" comes from the Hebrew term *qaneh*, which means "measuring rod" (see Ezekiel 40:3). The term also means "measure", "norm" (not necessarily from ethical perspective). In Greek, the word *kanon* means "measure" [1]. When used in philosophy, it acquires the meaning of "norm", "rule" (see Galatians 6:16). In religion, at the beginning of Christianity, the word "canon" was mostly interpreted as "norm or rule on faith". Later on, this word was also used for the canonical books, the inspired writings representing the norm for the revealed truth, useful for Christians' faith and life. Thus, in time, the term "canon" acquired the meaning of the official and normative list of the sacred and inspired books - a list that was agreed upon in time, around the 4th century A.D.

The need for a Canon was mainly motivated by the intent to collect the knowledge on God's revelation. Once the limits of what revealed were fixed, the divine revelation could be better preserved, and could be protected and analyzed in the religious practice. The process for the creation of the Canon was a long and complex one. The starting point was represented by the verbal traditions passed on and reviewed by communities and, subsequently, put in writing; later on, the books considered sacred and inspired by the religious authority were canonized (included in the Canon). Several questions were raised in relation to the themes of the Canon: why is there a limited number of sacred books? Why is it that only these writings were included in the Canon, and others were ignored? Is God's word to be found only in the canonical books?

2. THE HEBREW CANON

The Hebrew Bible contains 39 books, structured in *Torah* (five books), *Nebî'îm* (former and later prophets), and the *Ketubîm* (the writings). The history of the creation of these books is rather long, stretching over a millennium. Most of the writings were re-read, re-interpreted and drafted in pre- (587-536) and post-exile. The first collection, the Law or Torah, is said to have been created between the 8th and the 5th centuries B.C. The legal texts (Exodus 24: Deuteronomy 31) necessary to govern the life within the community were the ones collected first. According to the text in Exodus 24:4, Moses is said to have written the words of the Lord, the words being then read in the assembly of the people. Thus, around the year 400, the book of Nehemiah mentions Ezra who reads the Law of Moses to the people (see Nehemiah 8). The group of books of the Torah was probably already formed at that time.

The second group of sacred books regards the Prophets. The Deuteronomy trend, which outlined the importance of the Law and of the covenant, is said to have been responsible for the preparation of the former prophets (around 600-550 B.C.): Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. Starting with the 8th century, we witness the traditions on the later prophets, from Isaiah and Amos (the 8th century) to Jonah and Zechariah (the 4th century B.C.). Ezekiel 2:6 to 3:9 presents the image of a roll (sacred text) containing the words of the Lord, indicating that in the times of Ezekiel there was already a beginning of a collection. It is worth mentioning that many books of the prophets were revised pre- and post-exile. The two groups of sacred books, the Law and the Prophets, were relatively well defined in the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C., references to such books being made in Sirach 2 and 2Maccabes 15:9.

The third group of the Jewish Canon, the Writings, remains the most "problematic" one. It includes post-exilic works. The idea of a collection was more difficult to be shaped, with variations as to the name of the group, the number of writings and their form. However, around the middle of the 2nd century B.C., the prologue of the Book of Ben Sirach (Sirach 1:7-9) mentions all three collections: the Law, the Prophets and other Writings (Sirach 39:1). Reaching the times of the New Testament, Luke 24:44 mentions the three groups of books of the Hebrew Bible, calling them "the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms". Therefore, in the 1st century A.D., the list of sacred books was rather finalized. Joseph Flavius (95 A.D.) states that there are 22 books (there were 22 consonants in the Hebrew alphabet): the Law (5 books), the Prophets (13 books), other writings (4 books). However, there still was flexibility and freedom regarding the catalogue of sacred writings.

According to some exegetes, the initiative on the creation of a Hebrew Canon is said to have been taken at the Council of Jamnia (around 85-105 A.D.), an official list of the sacred books being discussed and established at this Council. Nonetheless, studies have shown that the meeting in Jamnia was not a synod (or council), but rather a rabbinical Hebrew school. Moreover, there was no official catalog of Jewish sacred writings issued in Jamnia, nor were certain books rejected. There was indeed a discussion on how one becomes impure when taking into one's hands the book of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, *i.e.* to what extent these works were sacred. The Song of Songs was accepted, while there was still doubt with respect to the book of Ecclesiastes. In reality, considering the disappearance of the service at the Temple and of priesthood together with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., in Jamnia, rabbis, representatives of the Pharisee trend, tried to define the fundamentals of the Hebrew identity (being in controversy with other religious groups of the Judaism). One of their main concerns was related to the sacred texts, the new religious identity being now based on the Bible [2].

Nowadays, many exegetes consider that a stricter list of sacred Hebrew books was established after the middle of the 2nd century A.D. In the Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Batra* 146-150 (late 2nd century), there is an exhaustive list of 24 sacred books (the 12 minor prophets represented a single book; other works were unified, as well, as is the case of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles). A part of the sapiential books, although used in diaspora, were not received in the Jewish Canon.

In this context, it should be stressed that the act of canonization was completed prior to the official list. When certain books acquire an undeniably and sacred value (as was the case of the Torah, already for a long time), they are already a type of "canon" [3]. At this point, it should be noted that some books were lost at an early stage (*e.g.*, the Book of the wars of the Lord, see Numbers 21:14; the Book of Joshua, see Joshua 10:13). Other books did not survive the exile of 587 B.C. or were not copied following the transition to another type of writing, after 530 B.C. It should also be considered that, in transmitting and copying the books, priest groups and scribes played an important role, as they imposed their choices and views.

In an attempt to assess this process, we raise the following question "What led to the creation of collections of sacred writings?" There were, first of all, religious reasons: the psalms were recited in the Temple; along one or three years, in the synagogue there was an uninterrupted reading from the Torah. Religious reading required preservation of the sacred books read in the gathering. Furthermore, there was the need not to lose the ancient laws and codices, as well as to preserve pre-exile books.

The reasons accounting for the creation of the Hebrew Canon were as follows. Firstly, there was the need to better define Hebrew identity. After the year 70 A.D., Hebrew religion becomes more and more a religion of the book. There is a focus on the importance of the Law and of the ancient traditions included in the Prophets and in the Writings. Secondly, the list of sacred books could resolve disputes between the different groups in the Judaism, providing a unified catalog. The dispute of the Pharisees rabbis in relation to literature and to the trends of the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D. is well known. In the creation of the Canon, the main role belongs to the rabbis, the spiritual leaders of Israel after the year 70. Thirdly, the list of ancient books in Hebrew (the sacred language of worship) would have solved the controversies with the Christians who chose the Septuagint and the Greek tradition.

1.1. The Palestinian and the Alexandrian Canons

For several centuries, there was the idea of two canons, the Palestinian one, a short one, and the Alexandrian one, which was longer. The short Palestinian Canon (which was more in line with the tradition) would consist of a list of 22-24 books, a catalog finalized in the second half of the 2nd century A.D. and present in the current text of the Hebrew Bible (TM = Masoretic text).

The Alexandrian Canon it said to have been opened and all the books present Greek influences (Tobias, Judith, Wisdom, Ben Sirach, Baruch, 1 and 2 Maccabees). The Alexandrian list would have been longer because of its inspiration from the Septuagint. This hypothesis is being more and more questioned, as the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible (the Septuagint) had a complex history and was prepared over a long period of time of about three centuries. In the beginning, the Septuagint was not prepared in the consideration of a longer list.

Nowadays, many biblical scholars believe that the Alexandrian list was not necessarily inspired from the Septuagint and that there was no different Canon for the Diaspora. The list of books of Alexandria was as flexible as that of Palestine. Furthermore, there was no concern for a specific number of sacred writings. Towards the end of the 2nd century, in line with what was suggested in Palestine, the Jews of Alexandria adopted the Palestinian Hebrew Canon.

Apart from the list of books in Palestine and in the Diaspora, there is said to have been a Canon in Qumran. In the 2nd century B.C., in Qumran, on the shores of the Dead Sea, there was a community of Jews who separated themselves from the cult at the Temple. The Essene community of Qumran used a comprehensive list of sacred books, which indicated that in the 1st century A.D. (in the year 68 A.D., the Qumran community disappears) there was no official catalog; on the contrary, there was freedom in the use of religious writings. The only book missing from the Hebrew Bible of Qumran was the Book of Esther. The discoveries of the Dead Sea (1947) revealed copies of other biblical books (Tobias, Ben Sirach) and copies of extra-biblical books (community books and apocryphal writings).

Therefore, the Hebrew Canon was finalized in the 2nd century A.D., being influenced by the historical context. Its creation was based on several main criteria. One of the fundamental criteria for inclusion in the Canon was for the works to be written in Hebrew, the usual sacred language used for worship. Therefore, books written in Greek or with Greek influences were not accepted. Another criterion was the antique character which ensured fidelity to the traditions of the fathers. Consequently, more recent books were not accepted, thus maintaining integrity and opposing Hellenistic influences, more and more obvious after 323 B.C. However, the main criterion for acceptance in the Canon was related to the possibility of the writings to reflect Jewish traditions and the religious identity of the people of Israel.

2. THE CHRISTIAN CANON OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The writers of the New Testament often quoted from the Hebrew Bible, usually from the Septuagint, considering the Hebrew writings to be sacred. They were familiar with the Bible being structured in the Law, Prophets and other writings (see Luke 24:44). However, the use of Hebrew sacred writings does not suggest a fix Hebrew Canon in the 1st century A.D. Moreover, Christians

used both deuterocanonical and non-canonical books. The Church adopted a corpus of Hebrew sacred books (possibly more comprehensive than the Alexandrian canon), probably the one existing in the Greek translation of the Septuagint. A problem is the existence of Christian manuscripts on the Septuagint only starting with the 4th century A.D. Later on, there are manuscripts containing different versions, also subject to areas where they were used.

In the 2nd century, there was a debate among Christians on the sacred books of Christianity. Justin and Tertullian referred to the Jewish Scriptures and to the books of Christianity. The discussion around the Christian Canon of the Old Testament was influenced by at least two factors: first, the heresy of Marcion, who rejected the Old Testament and attributed his books to a negative God (Justin, Irenaeus, Origen will stand against Marcion, stating the existence of only one God, who inspired the Old and New Testament); second, facing the decision of the Judaic rabbis to adopt a short canon, the Church (already independent from Judaism) considered it necessary to have a broader Canon, accepting other books.

Towards the end of the 4th century, we can speak a list of holy books where religious books (Deuterocanonical writings) are present together with the Jewish Canon. The Councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397) will decide on the use of the long Canon: the sacred books of the Hebrew canon and the deuterocanonical books. Thus, Christians adopted the Hebrew canon, to which other writings which could reflect the identity of the Church were added. The result is a list of 46 books presenting the events of the old covenant.

Beginning with Jerome, a dual tradition was recognized in the West: the Hebrew text for the books of the Hebrew Canon, and the Greek Bible for the other books. Discussions on the use of the short Canon (St. Gregory of Nazianz, St. Gregory the Great, John Damascene, St. Jerome) or of the long Canon (Justin, Irenaeus, Augustine) have existed for a long time, until the Council of Trent established the official list of the sacred books of the Church. The decision taken in Trento was a response to the Protestant Reformation which rejected the deuterocanonical books, preferring the short Hebrew Canon. However, the idea of a longer list take into account the authenticity of the Christian origins.

3. THE CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

3.1. Creation of the New Testament

The origin of the New Testament is undoubtedly based on the authority of Jesus Christ: his words and deeds. The starting point for the creation of the New Testament was the very Revelation of Jesus and his authority as final Creator of the Scripture (Matthew 5; John 8).

The first question concerns the manner in which Jesus and the New Testament authors relate to the Hebrew Scripture. First of all, they recognize the value of the latter as inspired books, but criticize some imperfect elements. On the other hand, they read the Scripture in the light of its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Besides the highest authority of Jesus, it is necessary to mention the authority of the apostles [4]. However, the apostles preached about their Master. At first, the message of Jesus Christ was proclaimed verbally. This initial preaching presented the person of the Savior and the importance of his saving sacrifice.

Another aspect regards the canonical consciousness. The writings of the apostolic fathers present a manner of quoting used for the Hebrew Scripture, by using the formula “it is written; the Scripture says”, and another formula to quote God’s words: “the Lord says.” In this case, the authority of the risen Christ is presented.

With respect to the beginning of the creation of the Canon of the New Testament, we need to focus on the Gospels written between 60 and 100 A.D. The Gospels contained the memories on Jesus, as witnessed by the apostles. Although initially the Gospels were related to local communities, in time they became universal. Later on, there was the consciousness of a unique Gospel, but manifested in four forms which have become the canonical Gospel writings.

The four Gospels were written in the second half of the 1st century A.D. and were intended for specific communities. An important question relates to the timeframe when the collection of four

gospels was adopted. Around 130 A.D., Papias of Hierapolis writes about Matthew and Mark. However, Justin (+165) shows knowledge of all four gospels. He states that the memories of the apostles (called Gospels) and the writings of the prophets (Old Testament) are read during the liturgical assemblies, being followed by the sermon. It can be noted that, following the year 150 A.D., a Canon of the New Testament takes shape, apart from the Hebrew canon.

The second group of books is represented by the Letters of St Paul. The collection of the Letters of Paul is older than the Gospels. The first book in the New Testament is the first Letter to the Thessalonians, written in 51. The following ones were the Letters to the Galatians, Romans and Corinthians, and other letters of Paul. The creation of a collection of the Letters of Paul was favored by their reading in public and by the exchange of letters between the communities. The text from 2 Peter 3:15 (around 100 A.D.) makes it obvious that the writer was familiar with a part of the Letters of Paul, considered "scripture". Thus, as early as the end of the 1st century, the Hebrew Scripture was just as important as the books of the New Testament.

Consequently, towards the end of the 1st century and the beginning of the 2nd A.D., the collection of writings of Paul was at least almost completed. Towards the end of 94 A.D., Clement quotes from the Romans and 1 Corinthians. In Polycarp's letter (around 100 A.D.) there are allusions to about 10 Letters of Paul. In a not too distant time, St. Justin lists the following letters: Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, Hebrew and Timothy.

Apart from the Gospels and the Letters, the last group of books of the New Testament is represented by the Catholic letters and the Revelation.

Following this development, we get to the following question: why was there the need for collections? A first reason would be the geographical distance. The spread of Christianity led to the need for clear communication tools between different churches. The most efficient tools in this respect were mostly the letters. A second reason was the chronological distance. The disappearance of the persons who were witness to Jesus' life led to the preservation of the memory of the apostles. A third reason is represented by the liturgical and catechetical needs. For the purposes of the service and of the catechesis, it was necessary to have information on the life and work of Christ and of the apostles. Finally, the always greater number of heresies (the heresy of Marcion, the Gnostic heresy) and of persecutions represented some additional reasons to put in writing and preserve the authentic traditions relating to the Savior.

Consequently, in the early 100 A.D., we reach the completion of all the books of the New Testament. Already used in communities, such books will be included in the 2nd century in various lists of writings on the New Covenant.

Finally, it would be useful to find an answer to the question: when does the Church consider the sacred writing of the Old Testament and the writings under the Lord's authority to be equal from the Canon perspective? The term "sacred writings of old and new covenants" is not mentioned earlier than the year 180 A.D. However, along with the Old Testament, the Gospels – containing the authoritative words of the Lord (according to Justin's testimony) – gained particular relevance probably from the very beginning. In the second half of the 2nd century, the other writings of the New Testament reach full canonicity: the Letters of Paul, the Acts of Apostles and the Revelation.

3.2. The Canon of the New Testament

The New Testament Canon comprises the list of the 27 books that reflect events of the new covenant. If at first the term "kanon" it referred to the norm, the rule of faith, starting with the 4th century A.D., it also applies to the sacred writings, to the decisions of councils or to the fixed parts of the mass. In his Paschal letter No. 39 of 367, St. Athanasius will use the expression "bible canonizomena" (canonical books). The same formula will be used at the Council of Carthage in 397: "canonical scripture". Thus, the concept of canon started to be used also in reference to the canonical books, those inspired writings representing the revealed truth, useful for Christian faith and life.

The canonical process was long and complex. The starting point was represented by the verbal traditions, transmitted to and revised by the communities and, later on, put in writing; subsequently, the books considered sacred and inspired by the religious authority were included in the Canon. The official list of the Canon was presented at the Council of Trent; however, the history of the Canon of the New Testament goes back in time.

A first issue to note is the difficulty in understanding the plurality of evangelical writings, considering that there was only one gospel. This can be proved by two initiatives. First, there was a canon initiated by Marcion around the year 150 A.D., a list that included only the Gospel of St. Luke ("euaggelion") and 10 Letters of Paul ("apostolos"). Later on, the work of Tatian's *Diatessaron*, a collection aimed at harmonizing the four Gospels.

Reaction to the above was prompt. Irenaeus, who alludes to the evangelical and apostolic writings, presents a Canon consisting of the four gospels, 13 Letters of Paul, Acts, 1Peter, 1 and 2John, the Letters to the Hebrews and the Revelation. Around 180 A.D., the Muratorian fragment circulating in Rome lists almost all the books of the New Testament (a significant absence is the absence of the Letter to the Hebrews) and also indicates data on the author, the recipient, the purpose and the reason for many of such books. At the same time, there are also indications of some heretical works and works not included in the Canon.

Tertullian states that the New Testament is the evangelical and apostolic "instrumentum". It includes 22 books, the only ones missing being the Letters to the Hebrews, 2 Peter, James, 2-3 John. Therefore, towards the end of the 2nd century A.D., there was a core of 21-22 books of the New Testament for the Church in the West. The Letter to Hebrews was missing in many lists, there being uncertainty as to it being written by Paul. In the second half of the 4th century, the Letter to the Hebrews starts to gain credit due to the intervention of Augustine, Ambrose and Jerome.

Meanwhile, the best defined collections were the four gospels and a group of 13 Letters of Paul.

With respect to the East, Clement of Alexandria was familiar with all the 27 books of the New Testament. Origen (185-255) considered that the main criterion for inclusion in the Canon was the unanimous consent of the churches. There is, therefore, a first group of universally accepted books called "homologoumena", which are not questioned: the four gospels, the 13 Letters of Paul, Acts, 1 Peter, 1 John and the Revelation. The second group is called "amphibalomena"; these books were subject to discussions: 2 Peter, 2-3 John, the Letters to the Hebrews and Jacob. The third category is represented by "graphe", non-canonical books, such as *Didache* and the letter of Barnabas. A similar classification is found in Eusebius of Caesarea: a) "homologoumena", b) "antilegomena" (subject to discussions), subdivided into those which can be included in the canon and the so-called "notha", books which cannot be included in the canon; c) heretical books, which must be strongly rejected. A book subject to serious discussions in the East was the Revelation. This is due to comments made by Dionysius of Alexandria (+264). He stated that the language, the style and the content of the book would not belong to Apostle John. Starting from these allegations, there has existed for centuries suspicion on Apostle being the author, the book being excluded in many places from use at the mass. In parallel, in the Church of Syria (Antioch), there were some discussions about the Catholic letters.

Looking at all these lists of sacred books, we note some difference between such books, indicating that, in the first centuries, there was still some flexibility with respect to the writings considered to be sacred and inspired. The differences are also due to the fact that the lists were created in different communities, which presented differences as to cultural sensitivity, problems and requirements.

A consensus on the canon is reached in the 4th century A.D. In 367, the Church of Egypt presents the Canon of the New Testament. The list is mentioned in Letter No. 39 of Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria, and includes the 27 books we know nowadays. Shortly after, in the year 382, probably in the time of Pope Damasus, a Canon is finalized for the Church of Rome; it was a catalog with the same 27 books (by decree of Pope Gelasius), with the contribution of St. Jerome. The list is also mentioned in a letter of Pope Innocent I to Exuperius, bishop of Toulouse, in 405.

Two other Councils, the Councils of Hippo (393) and of Carthage (397) confirm the catalog of 27 canonical writings of the New Testament.

In the Middle Ages, the canonical list of the Councils of the 4th century was accepted. This was also influenced by the apocryphal letter to the Laodiceans, letter present in some manuscripts. The Letter to the Hebrews, although canonical, needed new arguments to gain credit. The Council of Florence (1441-1442) confirmed the canonical tradition of the New Testament. Nonetheless, in Humanism, Erasmus of Rotterdam (1536) indirectly expressed doubt on the Apostle being the author of seven books of the New Testament: Letter to the Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, Jude, 2-3 John and Acts. However, there were no allegations as to their inclusion in the Canon, as the Holy Spirit is ultimately the author of any canonical book.

With respect to the canon related issues, a turning point was represented by Luther and the Protestant Reformation. According to Luther, there are some essential books in the New Testament; in fact, they stand for the true gospel: Romans, Galatians (essential as they present righteousness by faith), and John. The second category of books includes the Synoptic gospels. The third group of writings is less relevant, as it does not present Christ: the Letter to the Hebrews, James, 2 Peter and Acts. The reaction of the Church was prompt, being expressed in the Council of Trent. The "De canonicis Scripturae" Decree of 8 April 1546 indicated the list of the 27 canonical inspired books. The First Vatican Council will restate the statements of the Council of Trent. The Council emphasized the divine inspiration, the decisive factor for inclusion in the canon.

An important point in the history of the canon is the "Dei Verbum" of the Second Vatican Council. "Dei Verbum" 8-11 will state that divine inspiration is the fundamental criterion for inclusion in the canon. At the same time, it will outline the role of Tradition in the preparation and acceptance of the Canon. The post-Apostolic church received and finalized the Canon in the intent to preserve and protect the content of revelation: the writings whereby the Christian community defines itself and its identity.

As regards the criteria for the preparation of the Canon, they must be considered collectively and not individually. The first criterion was their tracing back in time. The books of the New Testament were written in the 1st century of the Christian era. The second criterion is the apostolic origin, although not all the books attributed to apostles were accepted in the Canon. Their contact with the apostolic age ensured them authority and credibility [5]. This is why the author had to be an apostle or a disciple of the apostles. In this respect, in the West, there were some doubts as to the apostolic origin of the Letters to the Hebrew (was St. Paul the author?), whereas in the East there were doubts on the apostolic origin on the Apocalypse (was Apostle John the author?). The third criterion is the Catholicity, *i.e.*, the use of the book in several communities and in the liturgy. This use provided guarantees as to universality, consensus and absence of errors. Important Christian communities in the early Church were those of Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome. A last criterion was the Orthodoxy or the compliance with the "regula fidei". To this end, there were suspicions on the Apocalypse due to the theory of millenarianism.

One of the most important criteria of acceptance in the Canon remained the reference to Christ, the center of gravity of the entire New Testament. In the end, Christ, and then the apostolic preaching, is the starting point for the creation of the Canon.

4. THE MAGISTERIUM OF THE CHURCH AND THE CANON

The Church played an important role in the creation of the Canon, as it indicated the group of sacred books received from Tradition. This operation was performed considering the assistance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is appropriate to mention that the Church does not create the Canon, but rather receives it from Christ and from the Apostles, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In this case, the most important role is played by the Holy Spirit. It inspired the sacred authors, led to the creation of the Scripture and assisted the Church in receiving the divine Word expressed in the books of Sacred Scripture.

In the history of the Church, the Canon received from the Fathers was confirmed by the Council of Laodicea (360), Hippo (393) and Carthage (397). The West recognizes the Hebrew tradition as the basis of the Hebrew Canon and the Greek tradition for the other books of the Bible. All these were translated into Latin (Jerome's Vulgate). The Council of Florence (1441-1442) confirmed the tradition of the long Canon. It also stated the idea of a single God, author of Old and New Testament, and the divine inspiration of the authors.

The Protestant Reformation gives way to discussions within the Canon itself. M. Luther had stated that there were writings of a greater value (Galatians, Romans), whereas some books of the New Testament would not lead to Christ. Starting from these ideas, he drafted a list of secondary books (the Letter to the Hebrews, James, Jude, 1 Peter and Acts) and placed it at the end of the New Testament. Furthermore, he places the seven deuterocanonical books the end of the Old Testament, calling them "apocryphal".

The official list of the Canon was drafted at the Council of Trent. This intervention was based on two criteria: first, the extended use of books in time, as Scripture in the Church highlighting the tradition; second, the presence of the books in the Vulgate, using the Sixto-Clementine Vulgate of 1592 (and not the Septuagint). In the "Decree concerning the canonical Scriptures" DS 1504, the Council states as follows:

„And because the Council knows that this truth and this subject are contained in the sacred books and in the unwritten traditions, which – received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ himself and transmitted by the same apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – were passed by one generation to another, and thus to us; therefore, this Council, following the example of an Orthodox Fathers, receives and venerates with equal piety and equal respect *all the books* of the Old Testament and of the New Testament – God, in fact, is the author of one and the other – as well as the *traditions* themselves regarding faith and morals, as they are considered to be transmitted verbally by Christ himself or suggested by the Holy Spirit, and preserved in the Catholic Church by continuous transmission.

And so that no one can doubt that the books are accepted by the same Council as sacred, it is considered appropriate to attach the list of sacred books to this decree.

Should anyone not consider sacred and canonical all the books, in their entirety and with all their parts, as customarily read in the Catholic Church and as contained in the old Latin Vulgate edition..., *anatema sit*!"

Apart from presenting the list of canonical books, the Council of Trent also highlights other issues. It states that God is the author of both the Old Testament and the New Testament; it uses the expression "sacred and canonical" with reference to the books of the Bible, as they are inspired by the Holy Spirit and represent the norm for the church; it admits the significant importance of Tradition. By adopting this Canon, which is longer than the Hebrew Canon, the Council preserved the authentic memory of Christian origins, as the canon of the Hebrew sacred books was in fact created after the creation of the New Testament.

The First Vatican Council will restate the statement of the Council of Trent. The Council emphasized the divine inspiration, the decisive factor for acceptance to the Canon.

A significant aspect in the history of the Canon is the "Dei Verbum" Constitution of the Second Vatican Council. "Dei Verbum" 8-11 states that divine inspiration is the fundamental criterion for acceptance to the Canon; at the same time, it will outline the role of Tradition in the creation and recognition of the Canon. The post-Apostolic church received and finalized the Canon in the intent to preserve and protect the content of revelation: the writings, which define the Christian community and represent its identity [6].

5. CONCLUSIONS

The process of creation of the Canon was long and complex. Until the finalization of an official list, it must be considered that, for a long time, many books were sacred and represented the norm, being used as such by Israel or by the Church. The official catalogue presented in the late 2nd

century A.D. (for the Hebrew Bible) or late 4th century (for the New Testament) was just a point of arrival.

The creation and finalization of the Canon was strongly connected to the historical context, being largely influenced by the historical conditions. In this context some books were lost and excluded. Furthermore, we must take into consideration that the process of inclusion in the Canon is not unitary, but rather fragmentary. There are several traces, routes of development of the canonical lists, until a major consensus is reached.

In addition, we must mention that there were different stages in the creation of the Canon: first the verbal tradition, then the transmission of a collection of materials (by care of copyists and scholars) and, finally, the drafting of the Canon. The drafted books acquired in the end authority and became the norm.

The Canon has a community dimension, reflecting the values of a particular community (Israel or the Church). The books of the Canon reflect the communities where they were written and respond to the needs of such communities. Consequently, it is possible for some of the books to define (and to correspond to) the identity of several groups, as in the case of the writings of the Old Testament, which are representative of either the Hebrew or the Christians.

Finally, inclusion in the Canon was based on compliance with the genuine tradition and with what indicates the identity of a religious group. Thus, the writings consistent with the religious system of the tradition were selected and accepted. The requirement of an official list was more determined by the need to preserve the identity and to define oneself in front of others.

It should be added that the Church fixed the Canon; however, it is not above the God's word, but rather subject to it. The Church enjoys the guidance of the Spirit to preserve the content of faith and of Revelation. In the first decades of Christianity, guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church acknowledges that some texts contain the written apostolic tradition. Thus, we witness sacred writings the source of which is Christ, and the message of which is encoded in the Scripture interpreted by Tradition. It is admitted that such books, the author of which is God, were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and were transmitted to the Church.

There was the question whether there was a canonical consciousness. The source of canonical consciousness could lie in obedience to God's word. The legal texts (the Decalogue, Exodus 24; Deuteronomy 31-32) and the prophetic oracles indicate that it takes listening and obedience to God's word, a rule for life. Canonical consciousness acquires particular importance in moments of crisis, when the identity of the people needs to be better outlined: in exile, following the return from exile, in Alexandria, after the year 70 A.D. [7].

In addressing the Canon, an important aspect to mention is the work of the Holy Spirit who inspired the sacred authors and assisted the inclusion of the books in the Canon. The Holy Spirit is still active nowadays, at ecclesiastic level, by means of the sacred books. Another aspect to be emphasized is the relationship with the revelation. The only source of revelation is Christ, the Lord. The components of revelation are present in the Church and transmitted by the verbal tradition. Verbal traditions are then fixed in writing, thus obtaining the inspired books.

The Church does not create the Canon, but rather receives it under the action of the Holy Spirit, manifested throughout history by means of the living tradition that comes from Christ and from the Apostles.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the Catholic Church, as well as the Orthodox Church, makes no distinction with respect to the importance of the writings, all of them being considered as having equal authority.

Even nowadays, the Canon is still subject to at least two separate debates. A first group of scholars (J.A. Sanders, B.S. Childs), the promoters of the critical analysis on the form of the Canon, outline the unity of the Canon and the research on the final form of the biblical books.

A second group (E. Käsemann, W. Marxsen) insists on the identification of the aspects, which take precedence over the other aspects, thus defining a "canon within the Canon".

Despite all the debates, we must note that the focus is not on a canonical list considered from a quantitative perspective, but on the significance of the Revelation and of the Divine Word contained therein.

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